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UNRESERVED ACCEPTANCE in child's education



Palacký University
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PREFACE

Each child should be accepted as they are, with their strengths and weaknesses. Healthy development of the child can only be supported by education in which the child is accepted, respecting the child's capabilities and needs and trying to understand the child's internal and external world, which is often for the child mysterious and at the same time full of surprises and expectations. The child requires not only the adult's attention and care, but especially love and understanding. An effort to control or manipulate the child does not belong in education.

The child is a unique personality who is born with a specific set of innate qualities into an environment that is given and significantly affects the child's development, both positively and negatively. Becoming familiar with all mysterious recesses of the child's soul will help us understand the child better and realize that this is the only way of developing a free personality.

Governed by this concept, the following chapters describe the principle of the child's personality and the opinions of renowned philosophers, educators, and psychologists. The specifics and principles of the child's mentality will be clarified. A true inspiration for working with children is surely represented by constructivist theories, which are recently becoming more and more popular. There is also an area focused on education in the family and in kindergarten. For illustration purposes the text includes simple examples from the family and kindergarten environment. *The objective of the publication is to present the child as a unique unrepeatable personality with the right to freedom and endowed with an ability to build one's own future.*

Having this in mind, I approached the writing of this book. The book is the result of many years' work in the area of preschool education.

The publication is intended for students of teaching but also the general public.

Eva Šmelová

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1 THE CHILD'S PERSONALITY AS AN INDEPENDENT AND DISTINCTIVE EXISTENCE

The depth of approaching and understanding children is clear from the title of Chapter 1 of *Informatorium školy mateřské* by Comenius: *“Dearest children, God’s gift, the jewel, they deserve the most assiduous care.”*

J. A. COMENIUS,
Informatorium školy mateřské

TO UNDERSTAND THE CHILD requires educators to know the child thoroughly. When we refer to the child’s personality, it should not be an empty phrase.

Currently, there are many scientific publications providing advice to adults on how to educate and develop children. These are mostly general recommendations, which are only applicable provided that the fundamental aspect of each person is considered – *uniqueness, exceptionality and difference from others.*

1.1 Concept of personality

SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE includes a number of definitions of the concept of personality. A significant personologist *G. W. Allport* (1897–1967) gathered a list of 50 different definitions, and later himself provided a *definition of the personality as a dynamic organization within the individual of those psycho-physical systems which determine his unique adjustment to his environment and his characteristic behaviour and thought.*

H. J. Eysenck (1916–1997) *considers the personality a relatively stable unity of character, temperament, intellect and body, which allows its*

unique adaptation to the external environment. According to J. B. Watson (1878–1958) *the personality is the final product of our habits.*¹

The personality has always been in the centre of attention of philosophers and literary artists (*Platon, H. de Balzac, F. Kafka*), psychiatrists (*S. Freud, A. Adler, C. G. Jung*), it is also present in the factor-analytical and phenomenological approach (*K. Jaspers, R. B. Cattell, H. J. Eysenck*).²

Regarding the fact that each personality is unique, they should be approached in a unique way and their individual peculiarities and needs should be reflected.

The basis of uniqueness, exceptionality and difference of every human being lies in the person's innate dispositions and in the effect of the external environment where the person is born, brought up and where the person gains experience. Rapid personality development takes place in *childhood*, which represents the initial stage from birth to adolescence (14–15 years) in the *physical, intellectual, linguistic, emotional and social* areas.

From an ontogenetic perspective, childhood can be classified into the following stages:

- *Neonatal (6–8 weeks),*
- *Infant (approximately 1 year),*
- *Toddler (from 1 to 3 years),*
- *Preschool (from 3 to 6 years),*
- *School maturity (around 6–7 years),*
- *Younger school age (6–11 years),*
- *Puberty (from 11–12 to approximately 15 years).*

Each period is characterized by specific features which need to be respected and the approach to the child must be adapted accordingly. Any mistakes that educators make during this stage are difficult to rectify later; they often have a negative impact on the person the entire life.

Z. Helus³ says that *“the personality is not innate but acquired.”* Each child has some potentialities enshrined, but the decisive factor is whether they are developed or not. A major role is played especially by the parents,

¹ HARTL, P. and HARTLOVÁ, H. *Velký psychologický slovník.* Praha: Portál, 2010, p. 373. ISBN 978-80-7367-686-5.

² HARTL, P. and HARTLOVÁ, H. *Velký psychologický slovník.* Praha: Portál, 2010, p. 373, p. 684. ISBN 978-80-7367-686-5.

³ HELUS, Z. *Pojetí žáka a perspektivy osobnosti.* Praha: SPN, 1982. In MAREŠ J. *Pedagogická psychologie.* Praha: Portál, 2013, s. 28. ISBN 978-80-262-0174-8.

peers and people in the closest environment, but also the individual and the individual's desire for achievement.

Human qualities are classified as follows: *character, abilities, temperament, and interests*. Their definitions below are based on *P. Hartl and H. Hartlová*.

Character qualities express people's attitudes to other people, things, work, overcoming obstacles, and to oneself. The structure of human character is dependent on the flexibility or strength of the links between different qualities, attitudes and values. For example in dynamic psychology, character development is described as: *amoral in infancy, useful in early childhood, conformable in later childhood, realized in adolescence, altruistic in adulthood*.

To perform an activity, a person needs to have *abilities and skills* of the required level. These can be classified into *sensory*, which reflect the performance of sensory perception (e.g. distinguishing colours or tones), *cognitive*, based on higher psychological functions such as *thinking, memory, attention, and imagination*, and *sensorimotor*, which reflect the unity of *senses and motor skills* (e.g. manipulation with objects, sports activities, speech motor skills). Their development takes place by means of learning on the basis of talents classified into *psychomotor, perceptual and intellectual*. In this context, the following terms need to be mentioned: *talent* as a set of aptitudes for a certain activity, and *talent*, which in addition to the high development of abilities reflects other personality qualities such as *persistence, engagement, reasonable aspiration*.

Temperament influences the dynamics of the personality, speed and intensity of reactions, is responsible for overall perception and behaviour of an individual, and is manifested especially in the emotional area. Temperament is innate and present from an early age. It affects thinking speed, memory, internal perception, depth and perception of feelings, expression, facial expressions, and pantomime. Imagine children and their expressions, which shortly after birth differ by various reactions to external stimuli, need to cuddle, activeness, etc. These features change throughout life, are subject to life experience, but usually do not change significantly and constitute a more permanent personality characteristic.

Interests refer to those activities that are appealing to the individual. They have a long-term focus and are accompanied by emotions. They

stimulate thinking, memory, will, and mental processes. They are linked to the individual's life and environmental influences.⁴

The interests of a preschool child are short-term, transitory, and are conditioned by the individual's abilities and environmental conditions. In the context of the child's needs, interests, and current level, the child should be offered varied play activities and creative activities.⁵ Kindergarten teachers identify children's interests by means of observation. These observations are subsequently used to motivate and develop the child.

- *In accordance with the curriculum, kindergarten teachers focus on the development of fine motor skills and related skills, e.g. tying shoelaces.*

Davídek (5) is unable to tie his shoelaces but refuses to learn the skill using a training shoelace. The teacher knows that the boy likes playing with means of transport, he likes building roads, cities, etc. The teacher uses the boy's interest for tying his shoelaces. When the boy plays with model trains, the teacher shows him how the train carriages should be tied together not to derail. The child is happy to cooperate with the teacher.

The qualities of the personality of a preschool child will be considered from various perspectives throughout the text in order to learn to understand the child as a unique unrepeatable being with the right to free and healthy development while respecting the specificities of childhood.

In this context, *L. J. Weinberger*⁶ that there is probably no absolute personality stability. Each person needs to respond and adapt to the internal and external environment and the requirements of the social world. According to the author, stability is a relative concept. *Personality stability* is thus the result of combined synergies of many different stimuli and causes.

For the work of a kindergarten teacher "*stability*" of the child's personality is important. In the context of interactions, the teacher observes typical and repeating features of the child. The teacher can predict the

⁴ HARTL, P. and HARTLOVÁ, H. *Velký psychologický slovník*. Praha: Portál, 2010, p. 373, 684. ISBN 978-80-7367-686-5.

⁵ ŠMELOVÁ, E. *Mateřská škola. Teorie a praxe I*. Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2004, p. 76. ISBN 80-244-0945-3.

⁶ WEINBERGER, J. L. *Can Personality Change*, 1994, s. 339. In MAREŠ, J. *Pedagogická psychologie*. Praha: Portál, 2013, s. 31. ISBN 978-80-262-0174-8.

child's behaviour, understand and help the child. In this way, the teacher strengthens the child's self-confidence and self-trust.

1.2 Inheritance, environment and education, three important factors in child development

INHERITANCE IS UNDERSTOOD as a transfer of a large amount of features, talents, dispositions and potential qualities from parents to their children. Hereditary qualities may or may not develop or manifest in the course of life. The inherited qualities that the child is born with are not purely biological but are the result of the development of ancestors in a specific social and cultural environment.

Human is a genetic-social being⁷

The qualities of a person are influenced not only by inheritance and actual functioning of the organism, but also the *external environment*, which is represented by educational activities of the parents, teachers and also other children. The child's social space gradually increases.

Table n. 1 – Shaping of the personality

Shaping of the personality		
SHAPING	external factors	intentional, i.e. education
		functional, i.e. environmental effect
	internal factors	intentional, i.e. self-education
		functional, i.e. spontaneous effect of endogenous factors

*functional – unintentional influence; intentional – deliberate influence⁸

These factors have an educational as well as extra-educational effect. This implies that the shaping of the personality is affected not only by education and internal factors, but this process is also influenced by spontaneous effects of the external environment. *The environment of persons in the process of education* forms part of the objective reality that interacts with

⁷ KOLÁŘ, Z. et al. *Výkladový slovník z pedagogiky*. Praha: Grada, 2012, p. 26. ISBN 978-80-247-3710-2.

⁸ Adjusted to BLÍŽKOVSKÝ, B. *Systémová pedagogika*. Ostrava: AMOSIUM, 1992, p. 33. ISBN 80-85498-18-9.

the individuals; they gradually learn about it, evaluate it, influence it, and become part of it. These include both *the natural but also the social environment* which has a strong formative influence.

The social environment plays an important role in the process of education. This is a *situational* function, which means that each educational situation takes place in a certain environment, for example at home in the children's room, or in kindergarten. The environment has three types of effects: *positive in accordance with the educational objectives, negative contrary to the educator's plans, but may also remain natural.*

- *In order to develop basic hygienic habits, the teacher makes sure that the children wash their hands before every meal. The child has the required background both at home and in kindergarten to acquire the basic hygienic habits, which provides the conditions for achieving the objective. A problem occurs if the family does not provide for the required hygienic and social background. In such case the set objective becomes unrealistic. The environment does not match the objectives.*⁹

*“The process of education optimizes individuals and their worlds, and forms a comprehensive, conscious, active and creative attitude of individuals to the world, i.e. nature, society and themselves. Education is therefore purposeful development of the personality (social groups) and its attitudes to the world by means of external and internal factors of its formation and self-formation.”*¹⁰

Education is deliberately used to affect the lifelong process of socializing of an individual. It is carried out in a specific *cultural and social system*, which comprises the four basic components of the life of the society:

- *Value normative components* consisting primarily of social values, norms, beliefs and ideologies,
- *Interpersonal relationship components* consisting primarily of social interactions, communication, and work-related activities,
- *Resultative components* consisting of material, spiritual and organizational products,

⁹ ŠMELOVÁ, E. *Mateřská škola. Teorie a praxe I.* Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2004, p. 81. ISBN 80-244-0945-3.

¹⁰ BLÍŽKOVSKÝ, B. *Systémová pedagogika.* Ostrava: AMOSIUM, 1992, p. 23. ISBN 80-85498-18-9.

- *Personality components* consisting of individual entities of the socio-cultural system, which in the course of their life update, maintain, develop or surpass this system and thus achieve self-actualization.¹¹

“The formative effect is directly linked with its objective position. The stimuli from the internal and external human organism act on the psyche of the personality through its self – regulative neurohumoral system. External causes act through internal conditions that are dependent on external influences.”¹²

Parents usually have a clear idea about how their child should be educated, about the child’s future profession, etc. Through the child, parents often want to achieve their own ideals and wishes. Although in good faith and unintentionally, they often confuse natural parental affection and deliberate motivation of the child, which narrows the child’s space for spontaneous behaviour and expression, often without any explanation. This also occurs in institutionalized preschool education.

- *What often happens is that parents and teachers shout at their children, give them verbal instructions all the time, and motivate them: don’t do that, you must finish your meal, look, you can do it, ...*

They constantly try to direct the child. Obedience is appreciated and the child is rewarded. The child is happy for being commended. But in fact the child is *“deprived of”* the right of self-expression. Naturally, the child requires affection and love of adults, a stimulating environment corresponding with the child’s possibilities, and a committed attitude of the adult, but this needs to be *non-directive without manipulative efforts*.

Speaking of the relationship between the educated and the educator, they are usually assigned different roles: *subject and object of education*. In today’s educational concept, this relationship is rather an external phenomenal matter because during the course of this interaction *the roles are exchanged*. The object of education is also the subject, irrespective of the individual’s level of maturity. Incorrect understanding of this relationship results in the dominance of the adult individual as the subject

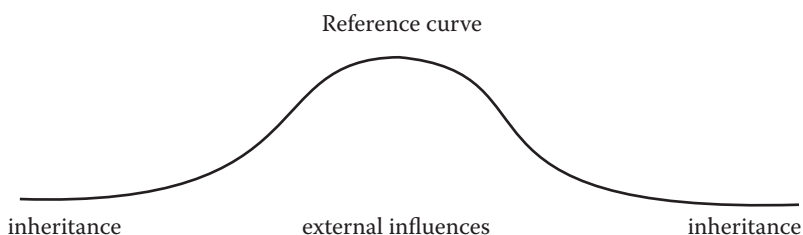
¹¹ HELUS, Z. *Psychologické problémy socializace osobnosti*. Praha: SPN, 1973, p. 11. ISBN 978-80-247-1168-3.

¹² RUBINŠTEJN, S. L. *Bytí a vědomí*. Praha: SPN, 1961.

of education; this individual becomes the manipulator, does not allow communication or free expression of the object, i.e. the educated. The consequence of this unhealthy relationship is insufficient development of potential educational, individual and social subjectivity. External efforts of educators should encourage and direct the internal conscious *self-formation* of the educated and lead them to a transition to *self-educators and educators* of others.¹³

Some theorists argue that the individual becomes the personality at the age of three years in the context of the development of consciousness of *I* and *will (I want)*. The period of childhood is a stage of rapid development, the potential of which should always be used by the educators in favour of the child.

Figure n. 1 – Reference curve



At both ends of the reference curve there are qualities or features that are predominantly hereditary, the mid-range includes more plastic qualities likely to be influenced by external influences.

¹³ BLÍŽKOVSKÝ, B. *Systémová pedagogika*. Ostrava: Amosium, 1992, p. 34–35. ISBN 80-85498-18-9.

2 THE CHILD IN SELECTED THEORIES

The components of the CHILD PERSONALITY are suggested by selected theories that describe various educational attitudes to the child. They include *empiricism*, *nativism* and *rationalism*.

2.1 Empiricism

EMPIRICISM REPRESENTS the theory of knowledge explaining the origin, nature, methods and validity of human knowledge based on sensory experience. The individual lives in an environment that acts upon the individual and the properties of which are perceived as the reflection of objective reality.

The decisive factor of mental development as considered by empiricists is *empirical evidence – experience*, environmental influence. They highlight the unlimited possibility of human development through learning. The representatives of this theory are for example *G. Berkeley* (1685–1753) and *J. Locke* (1632–1704).

Empiricists work with the deficit model of the child. They believe that the task of the adult is to identify children's experiences, skills, concepts, and to provide everything necessary for their life. Adults approach children as tractable objects that they shape according to their own ideas for the needs of life in society.¹⁴

The philosophical basis of various alternatives of empiricism is contained in the following concept: "*Knowledge comes from experience, particularly sensory experience, which is only registered by the subject, or introspectively processed. In principle, the subject is passive and registers what is happening in the surrounding reality.*"¹⁵

According to the concept of empiricism, the relationship between knowledge and external environment is considered an epistemology of

¹⁴ BRUCEOVÁ, T. *Předškolní výchova. Deset principů moderní pedagogiky a jejich aplikace v praxi*. Praha: Portál, 1996, p. 15. ISBN 80-7178-068-5.

¹⁵ KOLLÁRIKOVÁ, Z., PUPLA, B. *Předškolní a primární pedagogika*. Praha: Portál, 2001, p. 162. ISBN 80-7178-585-7.

“mirroring”. The content of human knowledge is *copying* or “mirroring” of reality as it is. This entails “*the development of mental representations*”, in the context of which the development of knowledge is based on the senses. Through their senses, individuals gain knowledge about the world. This process is based on sensory experience. According to the concept of empiricism, mental representation is immediate or inductively derived knowledge developed through putting together of observed objects and events.¹⁶

The advocates of empiricism highly appreciate the forming of habits and the process of learning through successive steps.

Empiricism played a significant role in the concept of the child based on the child’s role, i.e. whether the child is considered *a passive recipients or active explorer*. All of this has an impact on the behaviour and attitude of the adult towards the child. The personality develops throughout life and is a system of memorized responses. The theoretical background was reassessed and in many aspects doubted.

2.2 Nativism

NATIVISM¹⁷, represents a theory of intellectual development; according to the advocates of nativism, the factors decisive in terms of development are *innate predispositions*. Traditional rationalist nativism is based for example on the concept formulated by *J. J. Rousseau* (1712-1778) and *L. N. Tolstoy* (1828–1910), who assumed that “*the child is born as a good being and must not be spoiled by education*”. In the modern era, the advocates of the role of innate predispositions include *A. L. Gesell* (1880–1961), *E. Erikson* (1902–1994) and *N. Chomsky*. Nativism adopted important aspects from the area of *ethology and social biology*.

*T. Bower*¹⁸ summarizes the opinion of nativists as follows: “*Human knowledge and human skills are embedded in the structure of the organism.*”

¹⁶ KOLLÁRIKOVÁ, Z., PUPLA, B. *Předškolní a primární pedagogika*. Praha: Portál, 2001, p. 162. ISBN 80-7178-585-7.

¹⁷ PRŮCHA, J., WALTEROVÁ, E. and MAREŠ, J. *Pedagogický slovník*. Praha: Portál, 2009, p. 168. ISBN 978-80-7367-647-6.

¹⁸ BOWER, T. *Development in Infancy*. Oxford: Freeman, 1974, s. 2. In BRUCEOVÁ, T. *Předškolní výchova. Deset principů moderní pedagogiky a jejich aplikace v praxi*. Praha: Portál, 1996, s. 15. ISBN 80-7178-068-5.